"You have said, I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your offspring forever and build your throne for all generations." (Psalm 89:3, 4 ESV).

For the Old Covenant people of God, Psalm 89 must have served as a source of great hope while also conveying a message of profound perplexity! This was undoubtedly especially true for believers during the time of Judah's exile and Babylonian captivity. Beginning with the anointing of King David and God's establishment of a covenant with him,[1] the hope and conviction of the covenant people of God was that there would always be a time in which a king was on the throne. Indeed Psalm 89, quoted above, speaks of a "throne for all generations." However, we learn from history that in 605 BC King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged and overpowered Jerusalem, the city of David. King Jehoiakim, king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah[2] at that time, was obligated to pay tribute to the Babylonian monarch. He refused, was chained, and then taken to Babylon. Soon, King Jehoiakim[3] was succeeded by King Jeconiah, who was also exiled to Babylon. Jeconiah's successor, and the last king of Judah, was King Zedekiah. This king was forced to witness the death of his sons before having his own eyes put out by the Babylonians. He was then taken captive to Babylon.[4] The destruction of Jerusalem and the kingship then ended in approximately 586 B.C.

Given these historical circumstances, one can ask how these events should be interpreted in light of the Davidic covenantal promises that God Himself made to David: that there would be

[1] 2 Samuel 7: 12, 13 is of particular note. In this passage God, speaking through the prophet Nathan, tells David that He will establish from David's own body a king and that the throne of his kingdom would be forever.
[2] The Northern Kingdom of Israel and its kings fell to the Assyrian rule Sargon II in 722 BC. As a result, the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist.
[3] 2 Chronicles 36:5 reveals that Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. Scripture tells us "He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God."
[4] See 2 Kings 25:1-7

a royal successor to him and to all his descendants! In fact, how do we understand the Psalmist's own lament when he writes the following words in Psalm 89?

"But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant and defiled his crown in the dust." Psalm 89:38, 39.

Is the Psalmist accusing God of failing to uphold His covenantal promises? How should we understand this language of renouncing the covenant? The answers to these questions can only be connected to God's character and His covenantal promises of a messianic and eternal king. This essay aims to establish that Psalm 89 does not contradict the promise of an eternal king. Quite the contrary! Psalm 89 directs God's people to the hope of a messianic king who will rule forever! The paper will demonstrate that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true and rightful heir of the Davidic throne. It will also illustrate that the New Testament writers recognized the Lord Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of prophecies related to the Davidic Covenant. In the first half of Psalm 89 (verses 1-37), the author rejoices in the love and faithfulness of his God. It is a love that he declares "will be built up forever." To emphasize this great truth, the Hebrew word "hesed," meaning unfailing love, is used seven times in Psalm 89. The writer also highlights God's faithfulness, stating that it is "in the heavens" (v.3). To illustrate God's faithfulness, the Psalmist employs the Hebrew word "emunah," which also appears seven times in Psalm 89. The consistency and frequency of the Psalmist's use of the terms "hesed" and "emunah" first and foremost demonstrate the rock-solid certainty of God's covenantal promises. This covenant with David, like all biblical covenants, is rooted in the perfect character and attributes of God Himself. Scripture declares that this character is full of love and faithfulness.

John Calvin reflects on the intention of the Psalmist, who opens Psalm 89 with praise and focuses on the love and faithfulness of God. He states, "The purpose of the prophet, therefore, was to strengthen the minds of the faithful from the very beginning, with stable and substantial

support, so that they, relying on the divine promise—which, to external view, had nearly fallen to the ground—and resisting all the temptations that severely shaken their faith, might confidently hope for the restoration of the kingdom and continue to pray for these blessings with perseverance."[5] It is essential to keep in mind these two attributes of love and faithfulness if one is to interpret the later verses in Psalm 89 correctly. They serve as encouragement for every believer. Verses taken out of context, both in Psalm 89 and in the overall theology of the Davidic covenant, can be incorrectly applied and misunderstood. Calvin, who was always a pastor first and a theologian second, reminds his readers of the sure and solid foundation of God Himself. It is a foundation that can always be trusted! It is a foundation that will always be true to the Word of God.

These attributes of love and faithfulness are central to Psalm 89. "This opening section offers praise to God for the promises that provide stability to David and Israel. First, the prayer praises God for the attributes of hesed and faithfulness as the foundation of the relationship (vv. 1-2) and the permanence of those attributes." This is the same LORD who declared to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). The use of love and faithfulness in Psalm 89 emphasizes the centrality and significance of this theme within the Psalm. Professor Mark Futato supports this point. He comments on Psalm 89, "The reliability of God's unfailing love and faithfulness, each mentioned seven times in Psalm 89, is the existential question that drives this final psalm of Book 3."[6]

[5] Calvin, Jean, Calvin Commentaries, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 419
[6] Mark D. Futato, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 7, *The Book of Psalms* (Carol Stream, Illinois.: Tyndale House, ©2009), 289

Early in Psalm 89, as quoted at the beginning of this paper, the Psalmist reminds his readers of the covenant God made with David—a covenant based on the certainty of God's faithfulness and eternal purposes. According to verse three, God swore an oath to David that his throne (kingship) would persist for all generations, promising God's faithfulness. He writes that because of this faithfulness, the rightful heir to the throne would always be a descendant of David. Ultimately, this royal recipient would be the Messiah (Luke 1:31-33)."[7] Luke, quoting the angel Gabriel speaking to Mary the mother of Jesus, writes,

"And look, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom, there will be no end."

This gospel passage beautifully connects the promises found in Psalm 89 and II Samuel 7 with the eternal King, the Lord Jesus Christ. It also clearly teaches that one of the purposes of Psalm 89 is for God's people to anticipate a time when God will reign as king on the earth. Michael A. Grisanti summarizes the relationship between Old Testament Davidic Covenant texts and their fulfilment in the New Testament. He writes, "God's establishment of His covenant with David represents one of the theological high points of the Old Testament Scriptures. This key event builds on the preceding covenants and looks forward to the ultimate establishment of God's reign on the earth. The psalmists and prophets provide additional details concerning the ideal Davidite who will lead God's chosen nation in righteousness. The NT applies various OT texts about this Davidite to Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 1:1-17; Acts 13:33-34; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; et al). In the Book of Revelation, John addresses Him as the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev 19:16)."[8]

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[7] Steven J. Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 12, *Psalms 76-150* (Nashville, Tennessee.: B&H Publishing, ©2006), 76

[8] Michael A. Grisanti, "The Davidic Covenant," The Master's Seminary Journal, Nov., 1999, http://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj10p.pdf (accessed June 14, 2018).

The theme of the royal continuity of David's line resonates throughout the Word of God. The prophet Isaiah, writing during a time of significant political and spiritual turmoil in Israel,[9] wrote these words regarding the coming of a "great light" and an everlasting kingdom:

"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone (Isaiah 9:1, 2)."

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (Isaiah 9:6, 7)."

How should we interpret the words of the prophet Isaiah? The answer is provided by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Following Jesus' temptation, Matthew (4:14) recounts the Isaiah prophecy and its fulfilment by Christ. He teaches us that after his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went into Capernaum, specifically in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. It is clear from this text that the Lord Jesus Christ is the great light referenced by Isaiah. The context of the Isaiah passage further indicates that this same light is the "wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace." This same light's government and peace will never end! This same light will always sit on the throne of David. The Lord Jesus tells us who the light is! He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12). This "light" is King Jesus who has established His Kingdom that will never end!

In verses nineteen through thirty-seven, the writer of Psalm 89 reiterates, or reaffirms, God's faithfulness. This is quite significant and practically prepares the reader for the drastic

[9] Isaiah wrote in chapter 8 of his prophesy about the coming of the Assyrian invasion. This would ultimately eliminate the kingship in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

change in tone and message found in verses thirty-eight through forty-five. In these verses (19-37), God exalts David and honors him among the kings of all nations. James Boice comments on this passage, "These verses elaborate David's prominence as a king among the world rulers. But the greatest thing they tell about David's prominence is that he was given a special relationship to God. For his part, David would call out, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior" (v26). For his part, God would appoint David his "firstborn" (v27). Our great claim to prominence is that we have been made sons and daughters of God, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17)."[10] God reiterates his love to David and faithfulness in this section of Psalm 89:

"I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure" (28, 29).

In discussing this passage, one commentator offers this insightful reflection: "The Lord renews His commitment to David by affirming that His covenant of love and faithfulness will never fail. The fidelity and love of God endure forever (vv. 28-29; emphatic in MT), from generation to generation ("His line," v. 29; lit). It is significant that in the Masoretic Text, God's love and faithfulness are emphatically stated. This once again serves to highlight God's attributes and prepares the covenant believer for the transition that will occur in verse 38.

Having emphasized the eternal nature of the Davidic covenant and God's eternal plan for his "anointed,"[11] Psalm 89's transition verses begin at verse thirty-eight and run through verse forty-five. The Psalmist begins with a complaint. Clearly he is bewildered! The Psalmist begins his grievance with these words:

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[10] James Montgomery Boice, Psalms, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 728

[11] "I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil have anointed him" Psalm 89:20. In reference to the Messianic King we read in Psalm 45 "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. There God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions" (Psalm 45:6, 7)

"But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust" (Psalm 89:38, 39).

Steve Lawson entitles this section of his commentary on Psalm 89 as "the perplexity with God's faithfulness."[12] Commentators vary on their explanations for verses thirty-eight through forty-five. Lawson boils down the essence of the perplexity with this question: "How can God's apparent rejection of Israel be reconciled with his Davidic covenant?"[13] In many ways, the Psalmist has already provided an answer to this question. This is why the Psalmist went to great lengths in earlier verses to emphasize God's love and faithfulness. While this is true, there are still other Scripture texts that believers in both the Old and New Testaments can reference for answers. The prophet Amos wrote these words near the end of his prophecy. He wrote:

"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,"[declares the LORD who does this. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God" (Amos 9:11-15).

The answer to the Psalmist's question is found in God's plan for His covenant people. William VanGemeren comments on the Amos text (quoted above) writes, "The remnant would enjoy the renewal of the covenants. The hope with which the prophecy concludes is tersely stated, but there is hope (9:11-15). The crumbling Davidic dynasty ("David's fallen tent," v. 11) will rise with new power and inaugurate a new era of blessings. The benefits of the messianic era will extend to Israel and to the nations. This era is integrated in God's grand plans for transformation

[12] Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, 77
[13] Ibid

of creation so as to richly bless the world of creation with the full and permanent enjoyment of his people (vv. 13-15)."[14] VanGemeren ends his comments on this section of Scripture by stating, "The covenant people may suffer desolation and alienation along with the nations, but they are the object of God's love and of the renewal of the covenants, including the covenant with David."[15]

The answer to the Psalmist's confusion is that God did not abandon His people or His covenant. Yes, in accordance with the terms of the covenant, punishment occurred, and yes, Israel was exiled, making the situation appear quite hopeless. Nevertheless, these events were not due to the abandonment of the Davidic covenant. Commenting on this punishment from God, C, H. Spurgeon writes, "The Lord had promised not to cast off the seed of David, and yet it looked as if he had done so, and that too in the angriest manner, as if he loathed the person of the king. God's actions may appear to us to be the reverse of his promises, and then our best course is to come before him in prayer and put the matter before him just as it strikes our apprehension."[16] As a pastor and servant of the Church of Christ, Spurgeon understood well that when providential circumstances are difficult and even dark, Christians must rely on what they know to be true. They know that the certainty of God's promises is based on His perfect character. God would have the Psalmist, as well as all other believers living during this time of punishment and exile, look to Him in faith. Dr. Futato writes, "Perhaps no other psalm articulates with more pathos the agony of the soul that is felt when life's expectations call into question the unfailing love and faithfulness that are God's very character."[17] William Plummer offers helpful

[14] William VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 137.
[15] Ibid, 139.
[16] Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalm 58-110 vol. II*. (Mclean, VA: Macdonald Publishing), 34
[17] Futato, *The Book of Psalms,* 89.

encouragement while commenting on this Psalm. He writes, "However depressed in spirits, or in worldly condition believers may be, God can lift them up above all their enemies and adversities, and when the right time comes, he will surely do it. Of this He has given much assurance in the history of David, and yet more in the exaltation of our Redeemer."[18] For the godly believer, the lesson of Psalm 89 is to maintain hope in the Davidic covenant because a greater David will arrive. He is the one true Son of David whom God has exalted to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords for all eternity.

William Pohl IV describes Psalm 89 as "messianic in that it encourages hope in a return for David in the midst of lament."[19] He goes on to write that "the psalm indicates the loss of the Davidic dynasty is only temporary and the covenant has not failed and is not broken; and this messianic hope is rooted in God's character and kingship."[20] This argument is compelling. Some interpreters focus excessively on the Psalmist's complaint and lament. In other words, their emphasis on the so-called "failed" covenant seems to be the central theme of their interpretation. Often, their focus places abundant emphasis on verses thirty-eight to at least verse forty-five, without giving proper attention to what precedes and follows. Mr. Pohl argues that "the psalm reflects the pathos of demise of the Davidic dynasty while simultaneously being grounded in a messianic hope that recognizes the demise is only temporary."[21] He then goes on to show from a contextual and structural perspective why Psalm 89 should be considered messianic.[22] This

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[18] William S. Plummer, *Psalms: a Critical and Expository Commentary with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks*. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 835,836.

[19] William C Pohl IV, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89: A Canonical and Intertextual Study." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Sept. 2015, https://www.galaxie.com/article/jets58-3-03 (accessed June 19, 2018).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] It is not within the scope of this paper to focus on the contextual and structural aspect of Psalm 89. The author of the journal article suggests that Psalm 89 is a response to the difficult situation of Psalm 88. In that Psalm the writer cries out "O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 88:14). Mr. Pohl suggests that the hymn and oracle sections (vv. 6-19 and vv. 20-38) in Psalm 89 should be understood as keys to interpreting the Psalm as one of messianic hope.

argument contrasts sharply with those scholars who suggest that Psalm 89 is primarily a lamentation, as the Southern Kingdom of Judah faced captivity, leading to the perceived loss of the Davidic dynasty.

Perhaps one final example in Scripture that illustrates both the continuity of the Davidic covenant and its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ is the use of the title "Son of David." This messianic name for the Lord Jesus appears at least seventeen times in the New Testament. This is evident in the angel Gabriel's words to Mary in Luke chapter three, as quoted earlier in this paper. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Rome, directly links the Lord Jesus to the line of David. He writes:

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:1-3).

The title "Son of David "is much more than a statement on genealogy. Often times in the New Testament the Lord Jesus is referred to with this title in the context of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In several instances in the Gospel, Jesus is referred to as "Son of David" by individuals who were seeking God's mercy through faith. One example is Blind Bartimaeus in the Gospel of Mark. Upon hearing that Jesus was approaching and while sitting by the roadside, this blind man shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me."[23] Mark tells us that the people around the blind man tried to quiet him down. However, this would not stop Bartimaeus. The Word of God tells us, "he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me!"[24] The Savior healed the blind man, saying, "Go your way, "your faith has made you well."[25]

[23] See Mark 10:46-52
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day were well aware of what the term "Son of David" meant when others used it to address Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Matthew, we learn of their anger and contempt when Jesus was addressed with this title.

"And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there (Matthew 21:14-17).

One internet blogger summarizes this topic well. "Jesus further confounded the scribes and Pharisees by asking them to explain the meaning of this very title: how could it be that the Messiah is the son of David when David himself refers to Him as "my Lord" (Mark 12:35–37; cf. Psalm 110:1)? The teachers of the Law couldn't answer the question. Jesus thereby exposed the Jewish leaders' ineptitude as teachers and their ignorance of what the Old Testament taught as to the true nature of the Messiah, further alienating them from Him. Jesus' point in asking the question of Mark 12:35 was that the Messiah is *more* than the physical son of David. If He is David's Lord, He must be greater than David. As Jesus says in Revelation 22:16, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David." He is both the Creator of David and the Descendant of David. Only the Son of God made flesh could say that."[26]

The "Son of David' is the fulfillment of the promise made to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7. The Lord Jesus Christ sits on the royal throne and embodies the ultimate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding an everlasting king. He rules today as King and will rule for all eternity as King. We conclude this paper with the Word of God as presented in the Revelation to

[26] GotQuestions.org. "What Does It Mean That Jesus Is the Son of David?" GotQuestions.org. February 21, 2018. Accessed June 20, 2018. https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-son-of-David.html.

John the Apostle. It embodies the hope of all believers! “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” **16** And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God” (Revelation 11:15, 16).

May the Church of Jesus Christ always bow before the King who will reign forever! Amen.

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